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Blind Narberth Youth Picked For CIA Translator Course

By HENRY E. DARLING
Of The Bulletin Staff

Timothy John Finan sees about six per cent of the world through one eye and a contact lens.

But, if the ball bounces the way he wants it to, he's going to put that six percent to better use than most of us with 20-20 vision.

Tim is on his way to being an interpreter for the U. S. Government.

He hopes someday to be one of those fast-thinking, quick-talking interpreters for the United Nations—the language wizards who can translate Russian into English as rapidly as the verbose Mr. Khrushchev can shout it out.

CIA Crash Course

He was selected recently by the Central Intelligence Agency to take a crash course in Russian to prepare him for this work.

A talk broad-shouldered, 18-year-old youth, Tim puts it this way:

"Somebody down in Washington realized that we blind persons can do interpretive work just as well as a sighted person."

"I don't know who he was, but I'm grateful to him."

Comprehensive Test

Actually, the CIA did a very careful selective job. They took applications from around the country, narrowed the field to 57 and gave them a comprehensive, seven-hour test.

"Part of it was designed to measure our ability to learn a new language," said Tim.

"They would call out some meaningless words and numbers like—well, there are the actual words, I remember them—*genakum, one, twelve, three, shirm, four*."

"Then they would call out the numbers and we had to repeat them."

Blind Youth

The CIA probably took a lot of things into consideration before picking Tim and 16 others from the 57. Things like this:

Tim, who is blind, was born in Narberth, Pa. He was the first blind person to be selected for the CIA course.



Timothy John Finan

He plays the violin. A few years back, he built his own hi-fi set.

While he was at Overbrook, he heard that a blind German boy who could speak no English was coming to the school.

Helped German Boy

He bought a German grammar, and studied it in his off hours. When the boy arrived, Tim greeted him in accentless German and became his closest friend.

One day he took his friend to a checker game.

"Neither of us could see, of course," said Tim. "There was a Polish boy seated in front of us."

"We could, but he couldn't speak English very well."

The Polish boy told me what was going on out on the field. I figured out what he meant in English. Then I translated it into German for my friend.

Aids Understanding

Tim believes there is more to a language than just learning the words and grammar.

"You have to be able to talk with people in their native tongue to really understand them," he said.

"That's why we'd all be better off if we'd all learned to speak Russian. Then we'd know more about how they think."

CPYRGHT